

research: *The application of qualitative approaches*, Rockvill MD: Aspen.

George, T. (1988). Menopause: Some interpretations of the results of a study among a non Western group. *Maturitas*, 10, 109-116.

Glaser, B. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity*. Mill Valley, CA: The Sociology Press.

Griffin, J. (1982). Cultural models for coping with menopause. In A. Voda, M. Dinnerstein and S. O'Donnell (Eds.), *Changing perspectives on menopause*, 205-221. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Karp, D. and Yoels, W. (1982). *Experiencing the life cycle: A social psychology of aging*. Springfield: C.C. Thomas.

Kaufert, P. (1986). Menstruation and men-
strual change: *Women in midlife. Health Care for Women International*, 7, 63-76.

Leiblum, S., and Swartzman, L. (1986). Women's attitudes toward the menopause: An update, *Maturitas*, 8, 47-56.

MacPherson, K.I. (1981). Menopause as disease: The social construction of a metaphor. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 3.2, 95-113.

McCrea, F. (1983). The politics of menopause: The discovery of a deficiency disease. *Social Problems*, 31.1, 111-123.

McKinlay, J., McKinlay, S. and Brambilla, D. (1987). Health status and utilization behavior associated with menopause. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 125.1, 121-132.

Posner, J. (1979). It's all in your head: Feminist and medical models of menopause (strange bedfellow). *Sex Roles*, 5.2, 179-191.

Rauramo, L. (1986). A review of study findings of the risks and benefits of oestrogen therapy in the female climacteric. *Maturitas*, 8, 177-187.

Rosenhand, V. (1984). *Menopause and its effect on femininity*. Unpublished master's thesis. Florida Institute of Technology.

Schindler, B. (1987). The psychiatric disorders of midlife. *Medical Clinics of North America*, 71.1, 71-85.

Steiner, M. (1983). Psychologic aspects of the menopausal syndrome. In H. Buchsbaum, (Ed.), *The menopause*, 160-170. New York, NY: Springer Verlag.

Treloar, A.E. (1982). Predicting the close of menstrual life. In A. Voda, M. Dinnerstein and S. O'Donnell (Eds.), *Changing perspectives in menopause*, 289-304. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Woods, N. (1982). Menopausal distress: A model for epidemiologic investigation. In A. Voda, M. Dinnerstein and S. O'Donnell (Eds.), *Changing perspectives on menopause*, 187-199. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Menopause:

Tradition and Experience Create an Etching

By Sheila Laidlaw-Radford

Judeo-Christian tradition viewed menstruation with abhorrence; even today orthodox Jews refuse to shake hands with a woman because she might be menstruating.¹ "Christians inherited all the ancient patriarchs' superstitious horrors. Saint Jerome wrote that "Nothing is so unclean as a woman in her periods; what she touches she causes to become unclean." Christian women were commanded to despise the uncleanness of their own bodies, as in the Rule for Anchoresses: "Art thou not formed of foul slime? Art thou not always full of uncleanness."² Even the wondrous act of giving birth was regarded as unclean.³

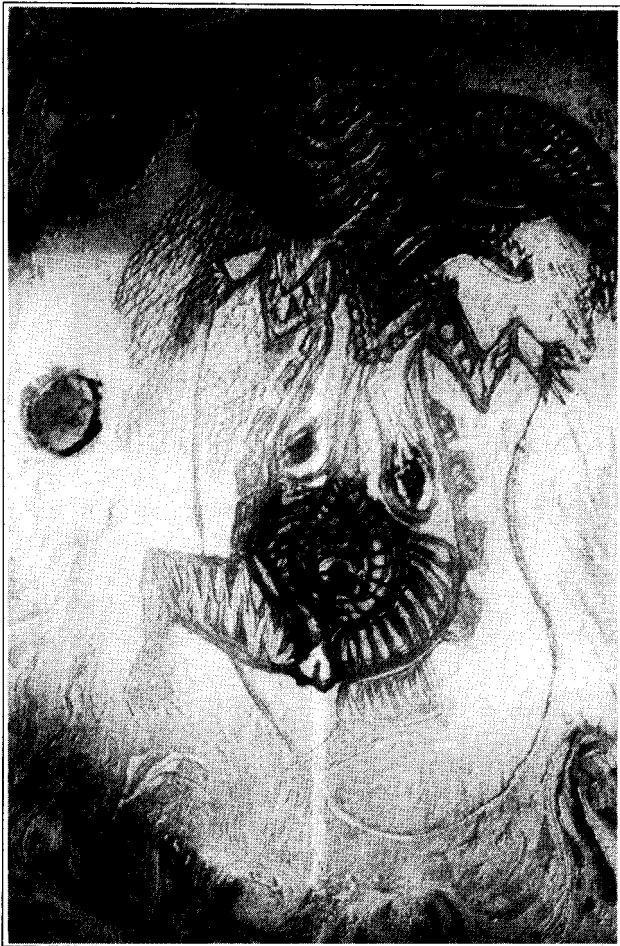
Physiological and psychological knowledge about menstruation and its termination in menopause has only recently become generally available to women. Traditionally in Western society this important message in their lives was treated with condescension and derision. It was mockingly alluded to as a time of irrationality and depression, often by innuendos or overtly lewd jokes. Somehow women were responsible for their own difficulties; society at large made little or no effort to understand. Embarrassment among women and shame for their own bodies made the subject taboo. The silence that surrounded the advent of puberty for girls followed them as women into menopause. For this passing of fertility there was no word of comfort from society, only a thinly-veiled repugnance. Even today, one of the words still used for menstruation is 'the curse.' We emphasize sexual desirability in women above all else; yet the reality of our femaleness, the biological function of losing blood when we have not conceived, traditionally has been regarded as shameful. How warped our society's values are when the potential to create a life becomes 'a curse!'

I began work on the etching, "Eve's Moondance to Menopause" with all of these attitudes present from my own background. I had approached menopause with some anxiety, but also with curiosity. Working on the etching and experiencing menopause were happening to me concurrently. Originally this work dealing with menopause expressed the mocking of women by society. I condemned society and felt compassion for Eve — and for myself. I created Eve as a victim; an absurd figure dancing as an alligator. Using dark and sombre colours and an excess of detail, I expressed her frantic despair as a target of mockery and derision. The social perception that menopause is equated with irrationality and craziness renders Eve a completely helpless victim.

This approach to Eve made me uncomfortable, for I had misinterpreted the reality of my own experience of menopause. Personally, I felt no depression or anxiety, only a peculiar elation — a sense of freedom and empowerment. One of the oddest sensations I experienced was that the reality and novelty of 'hot flashes' created a new reality; a sort of joke the body and mind played on itself. How could I express this feeling in my own etching?

The figure of Eve that I had created had its own shadow, symbolic of a fertile life now discarded. Eve was heavy with fear and a sense of fertility. I tried many colour adaptations, sixteen in all, but none changed the mood appreciably. After two years, what had started out as a minor work, a slight diversion, had become a long and very puzzling challenge. If in the end I managed to achieve a sense of absurd gaiety, it was after a difficult journey (in itself very fitting). It seems to me that in the passage of a woman's life, with all its vicissitudes, it is the humour and absurdity of her life that creates female reality. No doubt I felt some of this in the alligator-woman as Eve, and I began at last to respond to her. From then on she dictated the terms of her existence to me and the whole mood of the etching changed.

The dark colours disappeared. Dancing for her own pleasure, Eve cast off the



shadow of her fertile body with delight, letting it fall away. She wore her fantastic hat exuberantly, adding embellishments daily, no longer caring that it even looked like a hat! Her armour of scales gained an invincibility; her weighty dance an unstoppable celebration of joy in her own being. All grimness dissolved in vibrant light. At last she was free of society's restraints, freed from all anxieties about her own beauty and desirability.

At this point I created three separate etchings; a triptych documenting her experience of menopause as three distinct episodes during a passage of time. Since a large part of my work deals with the plight of 'Eve' in Judeo-Christianity, I began to think in terms of the crucifixion and resurrection associated with the Christian Easter. First I tried to show her as a suffering tragic figure; then as an abstracted shadow figure of transformation; and finally, in the brilliant colours of "Eve's Moondance to Menopause," as emancipated. But visually these three images didn't work as a unity. All were saying the same thing: the transformation of Eve as an ecstatic dancing alligator had to be a single instant of spontaneous experience.

The idea of sequence belongs to a series for actions imposed by others, as in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. His crucifixion was inflicted upon Him by the society of men; His resurrection was prescribed for Him by God. I wanted Eve to manifest an instant when body and spirit are one; an experience of the enveloping total unity of reality, not a laborious philosophical and religious analogy as in Christian doctrine. As a result, I abandoned the idea of a triptych and returned to the one image.

In order to create the sense of instantaneous change and movement in such an incongruous image, I deliberately offset the registering of the second colour impression of the etching, thereby creating a quivering iridescent light. At last it began to feel right, confirming this magic of Eve breaking through a barrier, going beyond the body — just as I had experienced with 'hot flashes.' Finally Eve was suspended as I had been, quivering between the knowledge of the body and something quite extraordinary. Eve, as an alligator dancing through menopause, free of the biological reality of childbearing, now had the freedom of being herself — *for herself*. She could be anything she wanted; crazy or sane, loud or silent, no longer constrained by society's prescription for her (which she had no part in formulating). Even this bizarre, undesirable creature — her breasts dried and sagging, her womb sealed over — even she could quiver with delight at her own self-realization!

This image of Eve belies the grim determination with which some

(top and bottom): *Eve's Moondance to Menopause*

women approach the aging of their faces and bodies. Their efforts to reverse this are numbing, from plastic surgery to excessive dieting and absurdly applied make-up. Naturally, aging bodies for women are not tolerated as they are for men. Media focus on youthful sexual stereotypes has resulted in this preoccupation. Even though women know we are being manipulated we often can't help ourselves. To become unattractive is as fearful as death. As youthfulness and attractiveness in women are synonymous, it is no wonder we fear menopause and its physical changes — our drying skin and wrinkles, our sagging flesh and heavy bodies.

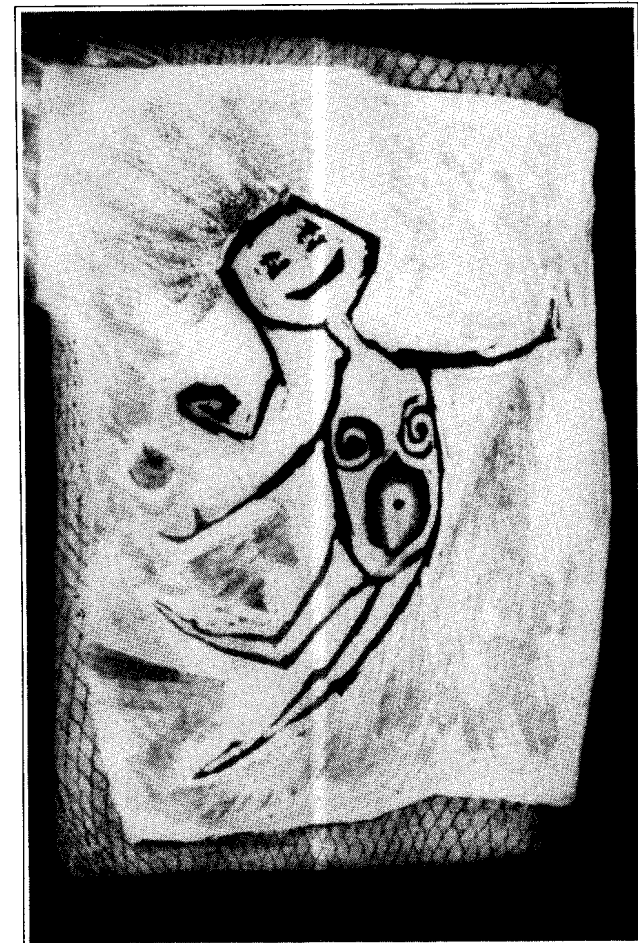
Precisely for this reason, I gave Eve in this etching all the physical disadvantages possible: not just wrinkled, but scaly skin; not just fat, but the body of an alligator. Not one shred of beauty or elegance is left to her. Yet she shimmers, creating her own glory in harmony with the moon. She is transformed: all the burden of her humanness is lifted; her heavy body flutters like a weightless moth. A resurrection has occurred without guilt or death. There is no sacrifice: her body is imbued with a state of grace, absolutely without the stigma of original sin (the responsibility for which Judeo-Christianity so generously bestowed on Eve). No longer is she the long-suffering martyr, the ever-patient victim (as is the passionless virgin of Christian doctrine, content to deny her own femaleness in order to become the virgin 'mother of God').

Eve has rid herself of the virgin/whore syndrome that rendered her a hapless victim of our society. At last she is empowered with her own reality. An instant of transformation celebrates the everlasting joy of her existence and the 'oneness' of all life.

¹ Barbara Walker, *The Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, p. 643.

² Ibid.

³ Old Testament Bible, Leviticus 12:6-7. Also pointed out in Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*, p. 101.



(top): *Eve Taking her Cue*
(bottom): *Eve's Delight*